

On Pioneer Immigrants from India to California

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An "East Indian" was documented in Jamestown, Virginia in 1635. Another Indian, from Madras, traveled to USA on a British ship in 1790, to promote trade links. Besides, some Indian servants who were brought to England by their masters, were later brought to USA when they migrated to the East Coast of USA. These were not real immigrants (1).

According to another source, the first wave of Sikh immigrants to North America began in 1890 (2), but according to www.oxfordsikhs.com it started in 1897. Most of them were strong male laborers, and worked in sawmills, built railroads and started farming (2). The first four East Indian immigrants who were allowed to land in San Francisco on April 6, 1899 were Sikhs. Father of Kartar Kaur Dhillon was the 5th person to immigrate later in 1899 (3).

Between 1903 and 1908, about 6,000 Punjabis entered Canada and nearly 3,000 crossed into USA. The section, "Pioneer Asian Indian Immigration to the Pacific Coast", in the website of UC Davis librarian, T.S. Sibia (www.sikhpioneers.org) mentions that during 1900-1917 some 7348 Asian Indians entered US and Canada, and they consisted of 85% Sikhs, 13% Muslims, and 2% Hindus. They originated from Lahore, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, Ludhiana, Sialkot and more so from Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur Districts of Punjab.

Sucheng Chan (1991) reports as follows. "Asian Indian immigration was far smaller in scale and formed a third pattern. Most of the pioneers were adherents of the Sikh faith from the Punjab region of Northwestern India. They paid their own passage to Canada and the Pacific Coast and came in small groups of three to five persons, relying on their own social networks -particularly their temples, which served as hostels to facilitate their journey. They came in search of work, but Hawaii was not one of their way stations; neither did any gold rush lure them to North America. Furthermore, they were not part of the traffic that shipped several million Indians to different parts of the British Empire to work in plantations, mines or construction projects during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (4)".

References: (1). *Becoming American*, 2012, PAHS, Yuba City, p12. (2). *Sikh Community Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest*, Wing Luke Asian Museum, Seattle, 1913; p.21. (3). *100 Years in the USA*, Pacific Coast *Khalsa Diwan Society, Gurdwara Sahib Stockton*, ISBN978-0-9814992-8-4; p19 & 73. (4). Chan, Sucheng (1991) *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 242pp.

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